Thank you M’am

By Langston Hughes

Modified by Bill Bartelli

She was a big lady with a big purse. It was late at night and she was walking home alone. A boy ran up from behind and tried to steal her purse. It was such a heavy purse the strap broke and he fell on the sidewalk right in front of the woman. The woman kicked him and picked the boy up by his shirt.

The woman told him to pick up her purse and give it back to her. The woman asked the boy, “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?” The boy answered, “Yes”. They fought for a while and a few people stopped to watch what was going on. The lady asked the boy, “If I let you go, will you run away from me?”

“Yes” said the boy

“Then I will not let you go” said the woman

“I’m sorry” said the boy

“Your face is dirty” said the woman, “I think I will wash your face, is there someone at home to tell you to wash your face?”

“No” said the boy

“Then I will do it tonight” said the woman as she dragged the boy to her house.

The boy looked about 15 years old, skinny, and wore tennis shoes and blue jeans.

The woman said, “If you were my son I would teach you right and wrong, at least now I can wipe your face. Are you hungry?”

“No, I just want you to let me go” said the boy

“Was I annoying you when I walked on the street?” said the woman

“No” said the boy

“But you bumped into me,” said the woman “And if you think you are leaving soon you are wrong. When I’m done you will never forget miss Luella Bates Washington Jones.”

The boy became nervous and began to sweat. Mrs. Jones dragged the boy inside the kitchen. The boy could hear her roommates laughing so he knew they weren’t alone. The door to the outside was left open.

Mrs. Jones asked, “What is your name?”

The boy answered, “My name is Roger.”

“Now Roger,” said Mrs.Jones, “go to the sink and wash your face.”

Roger looked at Mrs.Jones, the open door, then Mrs.Jones and the open door. Then he walked over to the sink and started washing his face.

“You going to take me to jail?” asked Roger

Mrs.Jones replied, “With your face all dirty I would not take you anywhere. I was walking home looking forward to cooking myself dinner. It is late you probably haven’t eaten either have you? You must have been hungry to try to steal my purse.”

“I want a pair of blue suede shoes” said Roger

“You didn’t need to steal my purse” said Mrs.Jones “All you had to do was ask me.”

Then there was a long pause. Roger saw the open door. He thought he could make a run for it.

“I was young once” said Mrs.Jones “I wanted things I could not have. I have done things I am not proud of, no one is perfect. I’ll start making dinner and you comb your hair so you look nice”

Mrs.Jones went out of the room to go cook. She did not look to see if he was going to run away and she did not watch to see if he would steal her purse again. But Roger sat away from the purse in the corner of the room so Mrs.Jones could see him if she wanted to. Roger wanted Mrs.Jones to trust him. The boy offered to go to the store for her but she didn’t need anything. Mrs.Jones did not ask him any questions. Instead she just told him about her job. Then after dinner was done she handed him 10 dollars.

“Now go buy yourself those shoes and I don’t ever want to see you stealing purses again” said Mrs.Jones “I hope you will behave yourself now. I need to go to bed now and get some sleep. Goodnight Roger.”

The boy didn’t know how to thank her and before he could even say “Thank you m’am” she shut the door